

Pequot Library  
720 Pequot Road  
Southport  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-314

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-314

PEQUOT LIBRARY

Location: 720 Pequot Road (northeast corner of Pequot and Westway Roads), Southport, Fairfield County, Connecticut.

USGS Westport Quadrangle Map; Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.643530.4554770.

Present Owner and Occupant: Pequot Library Association.

Present Use: Public library and lecture facilities.

Statement of Significance: The Pequot Library was designed by New York architect Robert H. Robertson (1849-1919) in 1885-87, and erected during 1887-93. Robertson had been a partner of William Potter, who together designed Victorian Gothic ecclesiastical structures in New York City in the mid-1870s. During the late 1870s and early 80s, his church and domestic work showed the decisive influence of the period's leading architect, Henry Hobson Richardson. The Pequot Library, designed in the "Richardsonian Romanesque" manner, is characterized by a granite sandstone construction, an expansive roof area subordinating the hipped dormers, ribbon windows, and an arcaded entrance porch as the focal point of the front facade. The building was given to the Pequot Library Association in 1894 by Virginia Marquand Monroe as a memorial to her uncle Frederick Marquand, on whose property the structure was erected. Mr. and Mrs. Elbert Monroe also donated funds for the acquisition of a valuable manuscript collection in American history. Today the library is used for special lectures and gatherings as well as the depository for the town's literary collection.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1887-93. The library was built by Mr. and Mrs. Elbert Brinckerhoff Monroe as a memorial to the Frederick Marquands, Mrs. (Virginia Marquand) Monroe's aunt and uncle, and parents by adoption. The building was erected behind the Monroe's house, completely

hidden from public view, and not opened until 1894. The secrecy surrounding the library's construction and the confusion of the townspeople is evidenced by the following newspaper accounts in the Fairfield "Advertiser."

March 29, 1887 "Workmen are busy on the grounds of Mr. E.B. Monroe. They are engaged by the Fling Building Company, who have the contract to remove the barn to the back end of the lot, and erect a certain building or buildings. One rumor says that this is to be a new barn, another that the new library building is to be erected there."

April 15, 1887 "We are informed on competent authority, that Mr. E.B. Monroe is about to erect a library building in Southport, to be built of Long Meadow brownstone and have a length of over 100ft. The plans have been prepared by the well-known architect, Mr. Richardson, of New York. The building it is said, will cost between \$40,000 and \$50,000."

July 15, 1887 "A rumor reached us that the cornerstone of the new library building was to be laid yesterday afternoon. If so, it was done very quietly. As there seems to be a disposition to keep everything connected with the matter a profound secret, we respected the secrecy and did not investigate. Delicacy is so rare now-a-days, that when it is found, it should be respected."

November 4, 1887 "The new building on Mr. E.B. Monroe's place is rapidly approaching completion."

2. Architect: Robert H. Robertson (1849-1919).

Robert H. Robertson was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 29, 1849. He received his liberal arts education at Rutgers College, graduating in 1867, and began his architectural training that year as an apprentice in the office of Philadelphia architect Henry Sims. Then, ca. 1869, Robertson worked as a draftsman for George B. Post in New York City. He began practicing independently in 1871. The Phillips Presbyterian Church (1871) in New York was one of the young architect's first commissions.

Robertson joined forces with William A. Potter in 1875, and together under the firm name of Potter & Robertson, they devoted their practice to designing Victorian Gothic college and ecclesiastical structures. The firm's New York work included Madison Avenue Presbyterian at Thirteenth Street, Church of the Divine Paternity in Central Park West, Lutheran Church of the Advent on Broadway and Ninety-third Street, Holy Trinity on Lenox Avenue and Union Theological Seminary on Park Avenue. In 1878, Robertson and Potter separated, and again, Robertson established an independent practice.

During the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s, his work displayed the decisive influence of the period's leading American architect, Henry Hobson Richardson. "Richardsonian Romanesque" was the style of the day and Robertson tended to follow the precedents established by his superiors. The plans and detailing of his Madison Avenue M.E. Church (1884), Rutgers Riverside Church (1889), the Pequot Library (1887), and many of his country and Fifth Avenue city house designs were characteristically patterned after Richardson's church and domestic architecture.

When classical orders were revived in America after 1893 and the influence of Paris' Ecole des Beaux-Arts was simultaneously strong, Robertson adhered to these trends in his public and commercial designs. The Academy of Medicine (1889) in New York, the Corn Exchange Bank Building (1892), the New York Savings Bank (1896), and Park Row Buildings (1896) were characterized by Neo-Georgian details and French design influences. Robertson died on June 5, 1919 in New York City.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Mrs. Elbert B. Monroe conveyed the title of the building and land to the Pequot Library Association on September 24, 1892. In a letter to the Library, Mrs. Monroe wrote: "In remembrance of many years spent here, and especially in memory of Frederick Marquand who, during half a century resided on this spot." The original officers of the Pequot Library Association, organized in June 1889, included Elbert B. Monroe, president, John H. Perry, secretary, and Virginia M. Monroe, treasurer.
4. Builders, suppliers: The Flynt Building and Construction Company of Palmer, Massachusetts served as the contractor, builder and suppliers.
5. Original plan and construction: As originally constructed the library was a near-perfect rectangle, measuring one-hundred fifteen feet (southeast front facade) by fifty-four feet. This section includes the lobby, reading room, auditorium, Directors' room and stack room. An ell section

was added to the northeast end in 1899, expanding the area of the rear stack room. The original front view designed by Robertson in 1887 has therefore been retained.

This one-and-a-half story structure is constructed of sandstone granite blocks and covered with a roof of red clay tiles. Because the long main section is covered by an expansive roof area, an impression of horizontality is created. In addition, the brown earth tones of the sandstone blocks and flat red of the clay roof tiles relate the low-lying structure to the ground and surrounding landscape, rather than upward in a vertical motion. Splaying downward and moving across its site, this Romanesque structure achieves a sense of small scale and low height through the interplay of the dimension and materials.

Before the library was opened in 1894 gas lighting was installed. The Southport "Chronicle" reported: "The building is to be lighted by gasoline, and tanks, generator, mixer, and pipes are in place. Mr. McGeem an employee of the Mitchell Vance Co. of New York, is attaching the brass brackets and chandeliers, and has them nearly all up save for the huge cluster in the center of the hall. About 100 burners will be employed, the exterior as well as the interior, being well lighted."

A delicate iron fence encompasses the Library's acre of finely landscaped lawn, designed by late nineteenth-century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. In March 1894 the "Chronicle" stated that the Pequot Library Association "voted to employ Mr. Olmsted of New York to make a plan for the lawn; with driveway, walk, etc., for the sum of \$25." By July the plan was in the process of being executed: "New semi-circular walks are being laid from the streets to the entrance of the building, a large part of one of the schooner loads of stone flagging that recently came into Southport being devoted to this purpose."

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Virginia Marquand (Mrs. Elbert Brinckerhoff) Monroe gave the original library building to the Pequot Library Association as a memorial to her uncle and father by adoption, Frederick Marquand. Frederick Marquand was born in Fairfield in 1799. He built his house in 1832 on the site where the library now stands. He was a successful jeweler and silversmith and retired at age forty. In addition to his principal vocation, Marquand invested in real estate, banks, industries and railroads. He funded Union Theological Seminary in New York City, - designed by Pequot Library's architect, Robert H. Robertson -

as well as the Theological Department of Yale University. With his brother Henry Gurdon Marquand, he gave the Marquand Pavilion to Bellevue Hospital in memory of their brother Josiah Penfield Marquand.

The library reading rooms opened March 1, 1894 and on April 4 the library opened for the distribution of books. By the end of the year, over four-thousand books were in its possession and in circulation, and 8270 people had visited the new building.

In 1899 Virginia Marquand Monroe and Mary Catherine Hull (Mrs. William Webb) Wakeman announced their gift of a collection of rare books, manuscripts and documents on American history. In addition, Mrs. Wakeman gave \$18,000 in memory of her daughter Eliza Hull Wakeman, to build an addition to the stack room. She wrote to the Pequot Library Association, "I have enlarged and furnished the stack-room, sparing neither pains nor expense to make it as perfect as possible. My desire has been strengthened by the knowledge of the number and the character of the valuable books which Mrs. Monroe has given to the Association. In the construction of the addition, in all its details, I have sought to give these treasures, and others which may hereafter be secured, a safe and permanent home."

Rev. William Henry Homan, minister of the Southport Congregational Church, 1877-1915, selected each item in the American collection. Homan believed that every library should concentrate on a special type of book, influencing Elbert B. Monroe on this matter. Monroe decided to collect books on Americana with a special emphasis upon New England town histories and local genealogies. In 1971 the collection was moved to Beineke Library at Yale University to be stored until additional space was provided.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

Photographs of Frederick Marquand House and Pequot Library, ca. 1887-1892 (including front view of Library and Marquand house in foreground; front view of Library, left of center; front view of Library and side view of Marquand house; rear view of Library; front view of Library, right of center; rear view of Library and stack room), Pequot Library, Southport, Connecticut.

Photographs of Pequot Library, 1894 (including front view, right of center; reading room and circulation desk; stack

room), Pequot Library, Southport.

Plan, first floor, Robert H. Robertson, architect, 1885-87.  
Pequot Library, Southport.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Spelman, Henry B. "A Cause for Pride: Historical Sketches of the Area's Background and an Informal History of Pequot Library and its Collections." Unpublished manuscript, 1958, Pequot Library, Southport.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Fairfield "Advertiser," March 29, 1887; April 15, 1887; May 27, 1887; June 3, 1887; July 15, 1887; November 4, 1887; November 18, 1887.

Fairfield "Citizen," June 3, 1971.

Schuler, Montgomery. "Robert H. Robertson." Architectural Record VI, No. 2 (1897), 184-219.

Southport "Chronicle," September 29, 1892; November 15, 1892; February 15, 1894; July 16, 1894, 1894, n.d.

Withey, Henry. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects. Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956.

Prepared by Jan E. Cigliano  
Staff Historian  
Historic American  
Buildings Survey  
January 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Pequot Library was designed by New York architect Robert H. Robertson in 1885-87, and erected during 1887-93. Strongly influenced by Henry

Hobson Richardson, Robertson designed the library in the "Richardsonian Romanesque" manner. The building's stylistic details characteristic of the mode include a granite sandstone construction, an expansive roof area subordinating the hipped dormers, ribbon windows on the main level, and an arcaded entrance porch as the focal point of the front facade.

2. Condition of fabric: Very good. A recent addition to the rear is not in keeping with the architectural character of the original structure.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The structure faces southeast. It is irregular in plan and one-and-a-half stories with a full basement. The original rectangular section measures 115' (southeast front elevation) x 53'-8". The 1899 stack room addition measures 31' x 49'-4".
2. Foundations: Irregularly coursed sandstone granite, supported by brick in some places.
3. Wall construction, finish, color: Rectangular sandstone granite blocks laid in irregularly coursed ashlar bond; granite is rock-faced and several shades of brown.
4. Structural system, framing: Walls and partitions are load bearing stone and brick construction. Wooden joist framing on the first floor and ceiling joists over the main reading room are nominal two-by-seven inch members set 23" on center. Those over the front hallway are nominal two-by-six members and 18" on center. Ceiling joists over the auditorium are nominal two-by-six members and 22" on center. Roof rafters are nominal two-by-ten inch members and 22" on center. Wooden joist framing on the first-floor stack room. Second-floor framing consists of a grid of iron members, riveted together and supporting thick glass floor panels. The grid is supported on the first floor by the iron vertical members of the bookshelves which function as columns. The stack room's roof joists are wooden, and eight traverse iron tension rods with turnbuckles prevent the roof from spreading.
5. Porches, porticos, stoops: A large triple-arched entrance porch on the front southeast facade. The three round-arched openings terminate in pedimented gable heads. Carved on each of the pediments are the inscriptions "1637", "Pequot Library," and "1887." The peak of each gable is crowned by a carved cylindrical finial. The thrust of the voisoirs granite arches is supported by two carved arch impostes and smooth built-up columns in the center and at the end walls.



6. Chimneys: Central irregularly coursed granite chimney capped with a metal pyramidal-shaped hood. A smaller chimney located on the northeast slope services the reading room fireplace.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance to the building's interior hallway is through an arched double doorway in the center of the porch facade. It consists of an outer and inner pair of doors within the round arch. The outer doors open either outward or inward and are constructed of diagonally cut wooden strips with alternating plain and grooved bands. The arched double doorway at the porch's western end opens into the auditorium. The doors are of diagonally cut wooden strips, with alternating plain and grooved bands.
  - b. Windows: Exterior reading room windows are two-over-two light double-hung sash. They appear to be replacements of earlier windows that were similar to the auditorium windows. Those of the auditorium are leaded glass sixteen-over-twenty-seven light double-hung sash. Stack room windows are tall, narrow round-arched casements. A Tiffany window is at the northwest end of the stack room.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: A hip roof covers the reading room and stack room; a pyramidal-shaped roof is over the auditorium. Large red clay tiles cover the entire roof area.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: A corbelled cut-stone course supports the projecting eave overhang.
9. Dormers: Three hipped dormers sit on the auditorium's three exposed slopes. Each has five-over-five fixed lights. A dormer with four separately louvred lights is located over the triple-arched entrance porch.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
  - a. Basement: Full basement extends under the entire area of the main floor. The partitions correspond to those of the first floor. Basement rooms are now used for storage of books and mechanical equipment.

- b. First floor: The main southeastern entry doorway leads into the central foyer. A double doorway to the right leads into the main reading room. At its northern end, the reading room opens into a smaller reading room; at the southeastern wall, the room opens into a bay window area, which is now a children's room. The circulation desk is located along the southwestern wall. A doorway in the northwestern wall opens into the stack room. To the left of the central foyer is the auditorium which measures fifty feet square. A stage is built against the northwestern wall. Built into the northern corner, a door leads into the Directors' room. A doorway at the northern corner of this room opens into a short hallway which connects the rear entrance with the stack room and Directors' room.
2. Stairways: A modern stairway in the front hallway along the northwestern wall leads to the basement. In the rear hallway along the southwestern wall, an original stairway with elaborate turned balusters and balustrade leads to the basement. A modern stairway to the basement is in the main reading room behind the circulation desk. An original steep stair-ladder in the board room which led to the attic is now replaced by a temporary ladder. At the southeast and northwest end of the stack room narrow metal stairways lead to the second floor. A dumbwaiter which extends from the basement to the second floor is at the southeast wall.
3. Flooring: Random length wooden boards cover the floors of the auditorium, board room, and rear hallway. The stack room's first floor is covered with small white circular tiles with a decorative border. The second floor has thick leaded glass panes with metal framing. Linoleum is laid over the floors of the front hallway, reading rooms and basement.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the auditorium, board room, rear and front hallways, and reading rooms, vertical boarded wainscoting of alternating plain and reed two-and-a-half inch boards covers the lower half of the wall. Plaster is on the upper half. Plaster walls with a simple marble baseboard are in the stack room. Outside basement walls are exposed stone and brick painted white; partitions are constructed of plywood and concrete blocks.

The auditorium's ceiling is shaped like a four-sided pyramid. It is supported by two wooden arches which intersect at the center. The ends of each arch terminate in one of the four corners and are supported by diagonal beams, each of which rests on two pilasters, engaged at forty-five degree angles. The ceiling is constructed of horizontal boarded rosewood. The ceilings of the board room, rear and front hallways, reading rooms, basement and second-floor stack room are plaster

painted white or light blue. The first-floor ceiling is the leaded glass panels of the second level's flooring.

5. Doorways and doors: In the auditorium's southeastern corner a doorway leads directly to the exterior entry porch. Immediately adjacent to this doorway, on the northeastern wall, two pairs of double wooden doors open into the entrance foyer. A single-paneled door at the auditorium's northern corner leads into the Directors' room. Simple molded wooden trim surrounds doors and windows. Three paneled doors in the Directors' room open into the auditorium, work room and rear hallway. On the stack room's southwest wall, a heavy wooden paneled door opens into the rear hallway. A similar door on the stack room's southeastern wall opens into the main reading room. A double door in the reading room's southwest wall opens into the entrance foyer. A single doorway to the stack room is on the northwest wall. A single opening on the southeast wall connects the main reading room with the bay window children's area. Adjacent to this opening is a half-circular alcove, opening into both the bay window and main room.
6. Decorative features and trim: A projecting cornice with egg-and-dart molding is in the Directors' room.
7. Hardware: All doors have their original brass hardware. The front door's original heavy brass plunger latch was removed in July 1966 and replaced by a safety-push lock. The stack room bookshelves were installed when the addition was constructed in 1899. Each section consists of two vertical metal tracks which function as supportive columns for the second level's flooring system. Wooden shelves rest on adjustable molded metal brackets.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Central heating throughout the building.
  - b. Lighting: Fourteen circular electric fixtures light the auditorium. Fluorescent lights illuminate the stack room. Modern electrical fixtures have been installed in the reading rooms and board room.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building sits on the western corner of the intersection of Pequot Road and Westway Road and faces southeast.
2. Historic landscape design: The library is surrounded by expansive lawns with a number of trees scattered around the property. Two curved walks connect the entrance with Pequot Road.

3. Outbuildings: A small dwelling which may have been the keeper's house on the original estate is located south of the library.

Prepared by John G. Waite  
Project Supervisor  
Historic American  
Buildings Survey  
September 1966

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southport Historic District Commission, several members of whom provided the necessary funds. The project was completed in the summer of 1966 under the general direction of James C. Massey, then the Chief of HABS; Ralph Schwarz of the Ford Foundation; and Architect John C. Waite (Columbia University); with assistant architects Christopher Benninger (Harvard University), Richard Haines (University of Kentucky) and Andrew Craig Morrison (University of Michigan), and architectural historian David T. Van Zanten (Harvard University), at the HABS Field Office in Southport, Connecticut. The data was prepared and edited in HABS Washington office in December 1978 by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in September 1966.